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AUTHOR Heath, Shirley Brice
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ABSTRACT

Society is not in a crisis of literacy, but in a crisis of literate skills. Being literate in today's formal education system means being able to talk and write about language, to explain and sequence implicit knowledge and rules of planning, and to speak and write for multiple functions in appropriate forms. Literate understanding requires far more than basic literacy skills, and the current emphasis on basic skills to eliminate the "literacy crisis" will not produce literate students. This paper gives details of research activity recently undertaken that brings teachers, students, and researchers together in classrooms in a collaborative study of language and that helps students improve their handling of basic mechanics and understand what it means to be literate speakers and writers. In this research, student improvement in basic English skills and increased facility in spoken and written English come as part of the natural process of meaningful research on the types and functions of language in their daily lives. (MSE)

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LITERACY OR LITERATE SKILLS? CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESL/EFL LEARNERS

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Shirley Brice Heath
Stanford University

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The task I have given myself in this piece is to argue that we are not in a crisis of literacy skills, but instead a crisis of literate skills. I want to argue that becoming literate is not the same thing as learning to read and write; it is learning to talk reading and writing. I want to argue that those who can solve this literate crisis are teachers, students, and researchers working together, and I mean here literally working together, not each independently toward a similar goal.

Teachers and teacher-educators may despair at this idea, since they could react with the view that they are being asked once again to add to their already overflowing task assignments. In addition to dealing with individualized teaching, mastery learning, different languages and learning styles, and endless other innovations in education, they are being asked to take on responsibility for solving another crisis—another task is laid out for teachers at the same time that many societal and economic forces demean their role as professionals, and diminish their hope of receiving a living wage. Teachers may well ask if we can expect them to take on this additional task.

I am afraid the answer is yes, and I can offer no easy solutions. It is at once both the joy and the despair of human life that it is far too complicated for those of us in either the pure or social sciences to reduce it to simple solutions or explanations. But as a long-time teacher, I have an initial confession which is the assumption underlying all I have to say here. It is the expectation that a majority of those of us in teaching—regardless of the age of our students—believe in the infinite improvability of human beings. Any evidence we may grasp that the potential of those we teach is being fulfilled is our reward for the long hours, lack of gratitude from the public, and demeaning tasks we are asked to do. Therefore,

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Shirley Brice Heath, Stanford University, is an anthropologist, linguist, social historian, and student of American literature. *Ways With Words* describes her collaboration with teachers on problems of language use.

my suggestions here rest on the continued good will of teachers, but more importantly, on the ultimate professional army of talent that waits to be released in teachers, students, and researchers as they work together.

I illustrate here in two cases how the combination of these talents redefined literate skills for students in a basic English classroom of Black dialect speakers in an Alabama high school and for a group of limited English speakers in an ESL classroom in South Texas. Two themes run through these cases; the first of these is the "tie-in" theme; the second is the "tie-back" theme. Both themes remind us of ways to link the language of the classroom both to the home context of students and to their future uses of language. The tie-in theme refers to the ties across forms of communication, from joke or story in the oral channel, for example, to news article or explanatory essay in the written channel. The tie-back theme encompasses our efforts to tie back what we are trying to do in the classroom to the first-language socialization of the students we are teaching and to better understanding of our own first-language learning. Both of the teacher-researcher-student linkages described here were part of a loose network of such triads linked through letter-writing; this pattern of linking was originally the idea of Amanda Branscombe, a former teacher in Alabama who had studied the teaching of writing with James Britton, Dixie Goswami, Ken Macrorie, and Nancy Martin at the Bread Loaf School of English.

In Alabama

In 1981-82, Branscombe was the teacher of a ninth-grade Basic English class of eighteen students (14 black, 4 white), all but three of whom had previously been in special education classes designed for students judged mentally inferior and having an intelligence quotient on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test between 75 and 85. In a brief meeting with her during the summer of 1981, I heard Branscombe talk about her methods of teaching writing in which she used a letter exchange between her ninth graders and her college-bound junior and senior English class. I asked her to take fieldnotes on this process for one class during 1981-82, to correspond with me throughout the year, and to share with me the writings of her students. I agreed to write letters to the students, asking them to focus on their own language learning and to become associate ethnographers with me as they collected data on language uses in their communities. Throughout the first semester the ninth graders wrote Branscombe's upperclassmen weekly, exchanging information on their respective social worlds. During the semester Branscombe read portions of ethnographies to the ninth graders, showed films describing the work of ethnographers, and prepared the class for their role during the second semester as my correspondents. In January, when the ninth graders no longer had the upperclassmen as correspondents, I began writing to the class, asking them to collect data on their uses of oral and written language. I asked the students to work together as a community of ethnographers, collecting, interpreting, and building a data bank of information about language in their worlds. They had access to knowledge I wanted, and the only way I could get that knowledge was for them to write to me. They collected fieldnotes, wrote interpretations of patterns they discovered as they discussed their fieldnotes, and they answered the questions I raised about their data collection and their interpretations. They agreed also to take responsibility for seeing through any

research write-up which might result from their fieldwork; they were to read drafts of my research reports and offer comments, corrections, and additions (Heath and Thomas 1984).

I wrote my five to ten-page single-spaced letters just as I would write to a university-level colleague, with one exception. In my first few letters, I spoke personally to the students, addressing individuals by name and inserting them into the text by asking questions, such as "You may want to know why this information is important." In subsequent letters, I wrote of general principles, depersonalizing the actions they were to take and decontextualizing interpretations of patterns I was beginning to draw from their data. In their fieldnotes and letters, they described the contexts, speakers, and purposes of oral and written language which surrounded them in their homes, work settings, and classroom. Branscombe supplemented these requests by asking them to discuss in groups in her classroom their findings and to challenge interpretations of pattern development. She took fieldnotes on these discussions, audiotaped some small-group work, and wrote accounts of her own assessments of the classroom as a learning environment.

Results of the year's work for individual students in the class are reported elsewhere (Heath and Thomas 1984, Heath and Branscombe, forthcoming, a and b), and only general points applicable to the class as a whole will be mentioned here. First, the students learned that communication is negotiation. Nearly every student who took seriously the task of associate ethnographer had a crisis of understanding with me, the distant other with whom they could communicate only in writing. I challenged points they made in their letters and interpretive essays, asked for evidence of their conclusions, pointed out contradictions I found in their fieldnotes, and critiqued their strategies in their oral interviews with informants. They initially responded emotionally to these challenges, countering with their own doubts about my aims. One student wrote, "I would like to know why you are doing this what are you going to gain by doing this and the way things are going I believe you have changed your mind about coming and don't want us to know and I don't believe you are coming if you are not coming you are wasting our time." Later they argued their points, asserting themselves as the experts they were over the knowledge they had collected, recorded, and interpreted. They turned the responsibility for careful reading back to me, asserting that I had not paid attention to their texts, or that they had written the information I said I lacked in an earlier letter. After an initial period of blaming the reader, they accepted responsibility as writers. They garnered evidence, admitted they sometimes saw the gaps I pointed out, and returned to collect more information, refine interpretations, or compare data collected at one point in time with those collected later.

In addition to learning that communication is negotiation, the students began to realize they could preplay their interpretations with either their classmates or themselves, listening for the arguments which had no data for support, identifying the gaps in knowledge which might keep readers from accepting their interpretation, and correcting their conclusions before they mailed them to me. Through the dyadic writing – first with the upperclassmen and then with me – the ninth graders had learned to play the role of writer and reader, to anticipate and hypothesize the kind of information the reader will bring to the text and the questions the reader will raise. They had learned to listen – to truly listen – to their own arguments, comparisons and contrasts, and persuasions, and to hypothe-

size another listener who did not bring their knowledge and background to their writings.

If the students learned that communication is negotiation and that they must play reader and writer roles in response to their own texts, what did the teacher and researcher learn? Branscombe and I gradually recognized that the best way to assess students' progress was to ask them to analyze their own written work. They had recorded, described, and interpreted patterns of oral and written language in their homes and the work settings of their parents, as well as in their own classroom. Why couldn't they look at their early letters and compare them with later letters? Branscombe helped the students focus on the features of their letters through which they might measure their growth: length, use of formal features (such as salutations, closings, paragraphing, etc.), and introduction and follow up of topics of interest to them. The evaluative process, usually imposed by the teacher, became one in which students helped determine how one letter might be "better" than another, and how far they had come between September and May in their writing. Furthermore, they could listen to themselves in small-group discussions audiotaped early in the year and compare their arguments then with their assertion of thesis, evidence, and implications later in the year. Thus teacher and researcher learned that evaluating could be added to the process of collecting, recording, interpreting, and comparing information on oral and written language.

In addition, teacher and researcher learned that the more the students talked about their research, the better their oral arguments became. Moreover, as they talked more, they wrote more, and as they surrounded their writing with more talk, they could more efficiently and effectively make their points on paper. Talking out their ideas in an atmosphere in which all students were focused on a similar task—the study of language—and in an interactive situation in which they knew a distant *other* would challenge their ideas empowered them to anticipate problems in their writing. As a result of their talk in class, they solved with each other many of the miscommunication problems which had arisen in their early writing, as the result of their failure to state clearly their topic, provide supporting evidence, and clarify the critical features (such as age, sex, situation, and audience) of samples of language they had recorded.

At the end of the year, all of the students moved out of Basic English into "regular" English classes, and two moved into "honors" English. Accomplishments were real and meaningful for these students. The teacher had, throughout the year, had a support system—a distant researcher with whom to share her students' work and her own ideas about curriculum, practice, and philosophy. The researcher had benefitted from being called to task by informants and by having an opportunity to attach research to practical outcomes measurable not only in quantitative terms but also in changes in the quality of classroom experience for students and teacher. The cooperation with teacher and students had allowed the researcher to put ethnography into the hands of those who could use it to improve both their knowledge of what was happening in their learning and their skills in oral and written language.

In South Texas

In 1983-84, Evelyn Hanssen, a graduate student in the reading program at

the University of Indiana, and Mark Ash, an ESL teacher in a South Texas high school, worked as researcher and teacher partners, studying the learning of English by the limited English speakers in two of Ash's classrooms. I had met Hanssen briefly at a conference where I talked about Branscombe's students; Ash was a teacher I met at the Bread Loaf School of English in the summer of 1983. He and Hanssen have never met, but through my written introductions, they agreed to begin a letter exchange in which Hanssen asked Ash's students to record for her their uses of oral and written language.

In early September, Hanssen wrote to Ash's classes:

> I...am interested in learning about how language is used in different parts of the country. Since I can't travel all around the United States, I would like you to be the researchers in your area. This means that I will ask you to set up or observe different situations, record the results, and report back to me. In this way I hope we'll all learn a little more about language.

Luisa, a student who rarely spoke out in class, wrote to Hanssen:

> Hi my name is Luisa here you fine me writting to you this letter. I hope you are fine. I am fine thank you. I will tell you about me. I am 14 year old. I go 9 grader. I hope you writte to me soon as pasable to now more about you. I want a teacher can't now spansh, for our class can't talk spansh. For English. I hope when you take a picture to now more about you. Please seen me a picture. I don't now who (how) to make letter to a frande (friend). Please i now you want under stande my latter. I want to now about you and i hope you tell me. Who (how) old are you. Miss or Mrs. Evelyn Hanssen. Please Miss or Mrs pleas take care. I hope one day you come.

Hanssen wrote back to Luisa and all the other students with a long single-spaced letter in which she commented on the common points of interest in the students' letters and responded to their queries about her. She then asked them to join her in their first investigation focusing on their uses of reading and writing. She wrote:

> I'm interested in knowing how teenagers use reading in their everyday lives. Everyone from the age of 3 to 83 reads everyday and most people write daily. But if we can indentify the kinds of reading and writing that teenagers do, this could help high school teachers plan lessons to better help their students.

She asked each class to split themselves into two groups; one-half of the class kept track of everything they read, and the other recorded all they wrote each day. She suggested some of the items they might read (signs, cereal boxes, information on the blackboard, textbooks, the TV Guide, etc.) as well as items they might write daily (notes to friends, telephone numbers, school assignments, etc.). She further suggested how they might work in groups to organize their "data," a term she defined for the students. The groups could categorize types of reading and writing, talk about what the categories meant, identify different

purposes for reading and writing, and consider how topics differed between their reading and their writing. Once the groups had drawn up categories and talked about these questions, they could count the number of times students in each group did reading or writing that fit into one or the other of the categories they had developed. She asked the classes to reflect after their group discussions on what their data meant and to answer some specific questions she posed for them: Do teenagers read or write more? Why do you think this is? What types of reading and writing do teenagers do most often? Why are some kinds of reading and writing more important than others?

The students responded with lists of types of reading and writing, notes answering specific questions, and reports of issues that had been raised in their discussion groups. They did not present a coherent picture of their views of reading and writing. Mary, a Spanish-English bilingual, wrote:

> We really enjoyed the work you gave us it was hard but fun not hard but hard to remember when you forgot to write it down.
>
> Yes a lot of teenagers read but they don't take it serious. I think they don't take it serious cause they well I have many more years to learn or thats the way I use to think. The most they do is writing cause theyre always writing to their girlfriends or boyfriends and reading to because they need to know how to read to be able to read the letters.

Mary argued that teenagers knew reading could benefit their learning, but they did not identify an immediate need to learn through reading for they had "many more years to learn." Writing, however, met a much more immediate need—communicating privately with members of the opposite sex in the public world of the high school.

Mary's classmates varied greatly in their individual interpretations of their data. Some focused on comparisons of the amount of writing and reading different homework assignments required, refusing to recognize any other kinds of reading and writing as valid for analysis. Others, such as Jesus, commented on the way in which Hanssen presented the project and her involvement as inspiration for him: "Thanks for all of your letters. They were so warm and friendly that I became even more excited about our working together." Still others took her questions about reading and writing to be a subtle reminder of their need to prepare for tests; one student wrote: "I think if I do my work and try hard I may have a good chince (chance) to pass the CTBS test." Still others suggested there were other questions which could be raised about the data. Luis wrote:

> I fould your letter very interesting. I did the assignment you asked for and it wasn't very easy. I would like to know what kind of writing do students like best? What kind of reading do students also like? My general reactions to this project are that I enjoyed it very much and I found it very interesting. I had never done nothing so intresting before.

Yet another student wrote in Spanish, saying she could not yet write in English and she was having a hard time understanding, but she believed that being at school in the United States would be good for her because she would learn to speak English.

Hanssen responded by telling them she would need more information on these questions; they would have to pretend they were writing to a "real dummy." She promised to analyze their data and send another letter asking them to follow up. Meanwhile, she asked them to do interviews about language, practicing first with members of their class, and then with members of their family and community. The interviews were to focus on the uses of reading. She gave the students tips on interviewing she had picked up from practicing an interview: "don't be bothered by silence; wait and give the other person plenty of time to answer; don't suggest answers, just help them remember." She reminded them that after the interview, they would have to write down all they could remember from the interview in terms as specific as possible. The students responded by telling Hanssen about the person they interviewed and their ways of conducting the interview, as well as their results. For example, Esmeralda wrote:

> I interviewed Guadalupe. I had a little troble because she speaks Spanish and the troble I had was to write everything in English. I tryed very hard to do the best I could on writing it in English. . . .Know what I have to write is what I learn about Guadalupe. Well in ways she is like me. The only thing different is that she speaks Spanish all the time and me I do speak Spanish but I speak English better and more than Spanish.

Other students assessed the project as "too easy," "not as hard as last time"; several asked for the next assignment. Still others used their letter to provide an update on the previous project; Juan wrote:

> . . . we're improving our writing. the first thing we do in class is write for ten minutes to our partner. Then write back to them. We're also writing letters to some other people in Alaska, Maine, South Dakota, and other places. We sometimes write to any students in our school.

The form of the interview results ranged from narratives within letters to listings of points made in the interview. Several students listed their questions and their partner's answers on separate pages; others tried to write down as best they could remember their partner's answers, and commented on the inadequacy of their recall. Letters to Hanssen were sprinkled with comments such as "I hope you like the project." "I think I need more practice on this." "I hope you can send us more work similar to the one you gave us."

In her subsequent letter, Hanssen turned the students' attention back to their first collection of the types of reading and writing in teenagers' lives, just as she had promised she would. She provided her own analysis of their data and raised questions she hoped they could answer. She noted that some students drew conclusions, others raised questions, and most must have grossly undercounted their instances of reading each day. She explained how she had looked at their data:

> . . . both lists of reading had about the same number of instances of reading. One writing list, however, had three times as many instances of writing recorded as the other list. Here it is in chart form.

Reading	108	101
Writing	180	64

Number of instances of reading and writing

> I'm not sure what all this means. Is that really *all* the reading you did? A little arithmetic tells me that each of you keeping track of your reading averaged 14 instances of reading for the whole day. I bet you really did more reading than that before you even got to school, but you weren't aware of it. There are a lot of things we read that we don't even think about. Because we do it so naturally, we don't notice it.

Hanssen raised other questions, showing the students the figures she had developed from their writing and the questions she wanted them to consider as they collected more data. She pointed out that their data showed that they had as many different types of writing as they had of reading. She closed her letter by asking "Do you think this would still be true if you remembered to record all the different types of reading you were doing that you didn't even notice?" Through the entire year, Hanssen responded to the students' data with analysis, questions of interpretation, and new, but related, research tasks.

The end of the tale of Mark Ash's students' adventures in their study of reading and writing has not come, for this article was written before their school term of 1983-84 ended. Hanssen will analyze their writings and report the results (Hanssen forthcoming). During the entire term, she kept a journal recording her thoughts about the project and her reasons for stressing certain questions at certain points during the year. The teacher had a very full year, filled with an increasing number of professional demands which came when others heard about his innovative project with his ESL students. Asked to travel about his region to tell other teachers about innovative approaches to teaching writing, he often had to leave his class to substitute teachers, who were not able to facilitate the discussions about the reading and writing research as the teacher himself could have. Family illness and resulting additional parenting responsibilities for Ash further eroded his time and energy in the classroom. At year's end, he positively evaluated the role the distant researcher Hanssen had played in sustaining reading and writing activities for his ESL students and in providing professional support, patience, and innovative ideas for him. The teacher-researcher-students collaboration had helped support a teacher during a year in which he had been hit by extraordinary personal and professional demands.

What had the results been for the researcher? As a former teacher, Hanssen wanted to explore ways to make her research directly helpful to teachers; she wanted to keep in touch with elementary or secondary classrooms. Through her involvement with Ash's classes, she had come to new understandings of research as teacher support. The data from students had raised questions relevant to the design of any research and to teacher education research specifically. Hanssen's work during the year had been both a pilot project and a curricular contribution. She had recognized how "problems" for teachers and students can become data for researchers, and how important it is to link a teacher's language model with a teaching model.

What about the students? Why did students who presumably lacked basic skills in English not spend their time with obvious instruction on grammar, spelling, and pronunciation? Through their fieldnotes, counts, brief reports, and letters, the students as a group learned to focus on language as object of study; moreover, they received practice in a variety of oral language uses (interviews, deliberation over data, group interpretation of Hanssen's letters, etc.). Their teacher wanted his students to know that there are many ways of presenting information, and speakers and writers must learn to anticipate what their audience knows. Through their focus on a topic they knew well-themselves speaking, reading, and writing in daily lives – students could see themselves as experts, capable of explaining any questions or confusions which arose about the data they had collected. The interest of a distant researcher in work they generated gave them a real audience, purpose, and motivation for collecting, reporting, and interpreting their data. In their letters throughout the year, those students who had begun the year with little writing experience in English, dropped their formulaic phrases which were direct translations from traditional openings of letters in Spanish; they wrote longer letters, sustained discussion on more topics in each letter, mixed types of utterances (from questions to exclamations), and introduced new topics with sufficient background to enable Hanssen to understand their messages. Hanssen's curiosity about their different types of language uses generated talking, reading, and writing which focused on language uses, forms, and content. Their focus on kinds of writing and reading in different types of occasions gave these skills a saliency they had not previously had and heightened students' awareness of the prevalence of reading and writing across types of jobs in their community. Some began to consider reading and writing not only in their current daily lives, but in terms of future scenarios in which they would like to place themselves. Their teacher had the goal of improving their reading and writing skills in English, to be sure, but he believed that these skills must be built on a solid base of understanding how language has to work differently on various occasions and for varying purposes. Since these students' experiences with individuals who have no knowledge about life in their South Texas town was rare, writing to Hanssen forced them to make explicit matters they usually accepted as known to others. Their exchanges with Hanssen were different than those they had with ordinary penpals, for her letters led them to attend directly to language and to receive her questions about their language as the starting point for subsequent letters. Their research made them take note of the rich patterns of language in what one student characterized as a "little town school." Knowing this little universe was a step toward preparing them to know the many uses of language which are "out there" in the wide universe of mainstream institutions.

The Tie-in Nature of Becoming Literate

These students, through collaboration with researchers and teachers, are becoming literate; they are not simply acquiring literacy skills. Both groups of students, previously relegated to classrooms in which they were rarely regarded as experts over any kind of knowledge, have been allowed to assert themselves as authorities over the important domain of knowledge about language. They have had to accept themselves as experts who have information which others value and want but must receive in writing. Thus their oral discussions in class, as well

as their prewriting and rewriting, have purposes; they are improving their chances of "making sense" to a distant reader who will hold them accountable for their language skills as well as their knowledge about language.

Their research reports, as well as analysis of their writings, indicate that they recognized the tie-in nature of language – the similarities and differences of types of talk and kinds of writing. In their letters, they wrote in personal evaluative terms about their findings, process of research, and hope that they were pleasing the researcher. Yet in their reports, quantitative listings, categorizations, and interpretive essays, they wrote of this same material in different ways. Students seemed to accept the need to become competent in expressing themselves in various forms of communication, and they used their talk in class to prepare for their written arguments, descriptions, and personal letters.

The work of James Cummins, Lily Wong Fillmore, and Merrill Swain has, in recent years, alerted us to the various functions of language and the different kinds of cognitive demands which come with social interactional language and academic tasks. Learners must, before they can become successful in using language for many functions, pay attention to the forms and structures of types of discourse. The work of Heath and Branscombe, and Hanssen and Ash involved students in cognitive academic talk and writing around topics about which they could express social and interpersonal views, but about which they ultimately had to be accountable as academic experts. Their topics for initial, repetitive, redundant, and multiply reinforced practice were, however, topics they knew well. They were immersed in the context of this knowledge through the uses of language which surrounded them daily; they had to decontextualize that knowledge to allow the distant researchers to understand what they knew. Through a variety of types of writing – personal interactive, fieldnotes, interpretive essays, and descriptions of speech and literacy events – students learned to see the relationships among the forms of different types of writing designed to carry different functions.

Furthermore, by achieving success in different types of writing focused on information they knew well, they avoided the initial failures which had for many of them accompanied their experiences in English classes. Captivated by writing and talking about an academic topic – language – students willingly engaged in numerous types of writing and repeated returns to observing, reporting, and interpreting materials they collected. The additional practice and reinforcement, which came through researchers' questions about their work, allowed them to acquire in a relatively short period of time skills which they had not learned in previous years of formal instruction around decontextualized information over which they had no ownership. For most of the students, within the first five letter exchanges, 80-85% of their words were spelled correctly, and they had left behind many of their mechanical errors. Modeling their correspondents' writing, they intuitively picked up features such as proper use and punctuation of salutations, closings, etc., and they imitated the structures of the opening sentences of paragraphs, as well as ways of introducing topics in their letters.

Yet another linkage between the skills practiced in their collection of language data and the usual requirements of English classes was their improved ability to observe. Numerous assignments, especially in ESL/EFL classes, ask students to observe contrasts between their own habits and those occurring in their new environment. Yet the skills of observing, recording, and analyzing such contrasts

have not been practiced on familiar habits. These students became experts over familiar materials before they were asked to compare and contrast unfamiliar materials. Consequently, when asked to compare and contrast materials given in textbooks, literature, or films, they had an habituated set of procedures, writing genres, and analytic steps to follow. They were able to tie-in knowledge about their own fieldwork experiences to decontextualized foreign information or situations.

The Tie-back Nature of Becoming Literate

For those of us who have come from mainstream homes where we were oriented to composition-centered tasks and academic uses of language from our earliest communicative experiences, the implicit rules of academic language seem natural to us. However, we have learned these rules in a rich context of numerous supporting, reinforcing activities. For most of our students, however, we have to make explicit the academic habits of using oral and written language which the school requires, and we have to provide social interactive meaningful occasions for repeating these habits again and again. Since we cannot know the specific first language socialization of the Indo-Chinese, Middle Eastern, African, or Latin American students in our classes, we can solicit from them as much as possible about their first language socialization through asking them to recollect and collect as much as possible. However, this information will not be sufficient to guide decisions about particular uses of language with which they may be unfamiliar. Thus, ESL/EFL teachers must incorporate into the classroom a variety of types of writing and talking about writing; furthermore the content around which these occasions of talking and writing focus should ideally be familiar. To complicate learning a new language, by asking that new content be learned as well, is to make extraordinary cognitive demands on students. Thus, we begin with what they know—their own language socialization—and we help them make explicit in their second or foreign language what it is they do know about their oral and written uses of language (see Vann 1981).

Tying back classroom activities to first language socialization necessitates making explicit the nature of academic language socialization. Language becomes the object as well as the vehicle of study. Turning students to the active study of their own uses of language enables them to verbalize for teachers and for themselves comparisons and contrasts between first and second language uses, on the one hand, and between their oral and written language uses in either one or both languages, on the other hand. With the interpretations of language researchers to facilitate their thinking about the meanings of these differences for pedagogical practices, teachers and students have a context for considering not just what these differences say, but what they mean for classroom practice. The research of anthropologists and social historians who have examined literacy across cultures and time periods lends emphasis to the need to link reading and writing habits to speaking habits (see Davis 1975, Graff 1981, Goody 1977). This historical and sociocultural work indicates that the adoption and retention of literate habits is highly interdependent with early language socialization. Maintenance and extension of types and functions of literacy depend upon participation in redundant, multiple, and reinforcing occasions for sharing orally the meaning of written texts. David Olson (1984) has underscored this point for individuals as well as

for societies in his identification of distinctions between "say" and "mean." Successful achievement in formal education depends on being able not only to say or report something but also to tell what it means. Such a task requires interpretation – reconciling what the data or text says with what the student knows. Students who come from homes in which their first language socialization includes daily such occasions for interpretation are usually able to take up school tasks much more readily than those students who have not experienced repeated occasions for having to articulate the meaning of words, events, and texts.

Briefly, the following early language socialization experiences seem to correlate positively with academic success and the retention of literate habits.[1]

(1) *Participation in talk delineating the sequence or the problem-and-solution aspects of on-going actions.* From descriptions of the process of getting dressed which a mother might narrate while dressing a young child, to a football coach's explanation of plays, students may hear this type of language. The extent to which preschoolers are asked to produce such talk varies greatly across cultures, and yet the ability to sequence events, explain step-by step procedures, and talk aloud about ways to solve problems is critical in academic tasks. Branscombe's students collected such data on the younger children in their families by simply recording all the types of questions adults asked preschoolers for several days at different points during their research. They were then able to compare the types of questions asked at home with those used most frequently in classrooms at school.

(2) *Participation in situations in which adults expect children to compare one phenomenon (e.g. action, scene, character, object, occasion, or written text) with another.* Adults rarely ask young children directly to make comparisons, but they will model analogical or metaphorical reasoning through their own use of and commentary on proverbs, stories, or statements of comparison and contrast ("Look carefully. That boot is not like your other one, is it?"). The subtle need to compare one situation with another and to carry the meaning of the first to the second is most often realized in story-telling. Adults may tell tales about their own or others' misdeeds as children and leave a heavy moral point hanging with the story. For their own children, they may state only a brief portion of the story as a reminder that current behaviors are similar to those of the story or they could lead to similar consequences. Without formal explication of the similarities and differences, children learn to link one occasion to another and to draw the meaning of such comparisons for their own behavior. Students in the classrooms described here collected tales from their communities as well as proverbs or aphorisms used by adults to call up metaphorical linkages in their children. In mainstream literate homes and in classrooms, numerous occasions demand that we

[1]Elsewhere these occasions for participation are discussed in the context of the first language socialization of specific cultures – mainstream literate, Southeastern black working-class, Southeastern white working-class (Heath 1983, Heath forthcoming a) and Mexican American and Chinese American (Heath forthcoming b). The terms given some of these situations elsewhere are: reports (retellings of experiences or stories according to a prescribed sequence, with scaffolding support from an elder), accounts (fresh tellings of information or interpretations known only to the teller and not to listeners), eventcasts (summaries of the sequence of ongoing actions or forecasts of events to come), and stories (tales which include an animate character with goals; such tales often include analogical or metaphorical references, forcing listeners to compare the tale's events or meaning to current situations).

be able to compare one scene or situation with another without full explication of the similarities and differences.

(3) *Participation in verbal explanation of cause and effects*. Students in Branscombe's and Ash's classrooms had to explain cases of miscommunication by identifying sources or causes of the failure of one speaker or writer to connect with listener or reader. They recounted cases in their daily lives when adults or peers asked them to explain causes and effects: "What did you think would happen if you left your skates on the stairway? "What did you think the coach would do if you missed another practice?" In their classrooms, they began to identify their teachers' requests for explanations of causes and effects and to link these requests with certain types of discourse, such as argumentation, persuasion, generalization from specific facts, etc.

(4) *Participation in verbatim or near-verbatim retellings*. Students in Branscombe's class read books to younger children in their families and asked the youngsters to retell the stories. They listened for occasions when adults at both home and school asked for retellings and asked questions which prompted students to tell about events in the order in which they occurred or in the same way they had been given in a printed source.

(5) *Participation in story-telling*. Stories include an animate being who moves through a series of events with goal-directed behavior (Stein 1982), and familiarity with these in oral or written form enables students to participate with ease in several types of classroom activities. Textbooks across the curriculum contain stories placed within the expository text to increase students' interest and to provide variety in forms of genre. Students in the classrooms described here collected stories and analyzed the structures of those they judged as "good." They could then apply their standards to stories they found in textbooks or other classroom readings. Intuitively, they came to understand how the expected structure of stories helps listeners and readers anticipate what will come next in both oral and written stories.

These five situation types occur repeatedly in classrooms. Collection, identification, and analysis of language outside of the classroom or through recollected experiences of early childhood can help ESL/EFL students bring to consciousness the structures and implicit assumptions which surround these situations in academic performance. The more extensive and intensive a student's out-of-school experience has been with all of these types, the more likely the student will be able to meet academic performance requirements in school. We can begin to compensate for a lack of experience with these situation types by turning students' attention to their existence in their current environment beyond the classroom.

Conclusions

Being literate in today's formal education system means being able to talk and write about language as such, to explain and sequence implicit knowledge and rules of planning, and to speak and write for multiple functions in appropriate forms. Literate understanding requires far more than basic literacy skills, and the current emphasis on basic skills to eliminate the "literacy crisis" will not give us literate students. The kinds of activities described here in the class rooms of Branscombe and Ash brought teacher, researcher, and students together in the study of language; through this collaboration, students improved their hand-

ling of basic mechanics and came to understand what it means to be literate speakers and writers. Improving their basic skills in English and their facility in spoken and written English came as part of the natural process of meaningful research on the types and functions of language in their daily lives.

Jerome Bruner reminds us that "Learning is most often figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you currently think" (1983:183). These students, teachers, and researchers working together played out Bruner's insight into learning. Language use in every moment is a reduction of uncertainty, but the uncertainty is never totally reduced. I have argued here that the attempt to reduce students' uncertainties about language should not come through teacher imposition of rules of grammar and occasions for practiced drills of decontextualized and depersonalized tasks. Instead, together students, teacher, and researcher can focus on what students already know to accomplish a joint reduction of the uncertainties of language. With such collaborative work, we can all better appreciate that a single piece of evidence of language use touches a world of antecedents and assumptions; if we follow these beginnings, they will lead us to the centers of social and cognitive worlds about which we can best learn together.

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